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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that, as technology changes at an accelerating rate, it is increasingly difficult for technical faculty and institutions to secure and incorporate relevant course content. Currently, companies and schools join in advisory capacities to identify competencies and develop appropriate curricula, a model that has been around since the 1940s. But these authors contend that only a few schools have become cooperating curriculum training models. Most simply go through the motions of being responsive, and end up teaching what they want. Minnesota West Community and Technical College (MnWest) has developed a Web-based advisory process, which is presented here. The process involves two steps. The first step is project faculty and staff develop content-specific lessons for their advisory committee. Each lesson is examined and evaluated online at company sites by working professionals. Then, each lesson is modified as per confidential electronic input. The second step is, after re-testing, the lessons are incorporated within the associated college programs and at participating companies. Technical faculty are at the center of the project, and the process can be utilized in academic settings by emphasizing research and collaboration rather than job preparation. The authors suggest that other colleges could benefit from adopting this model. (NB)

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Revitalizing Advisory Committees and DACUM through the Web

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Minnesota West Community & Technical College

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Revitalizing Advisory Committees and DACUM through the Web

Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Presented at the Teaching in the Community College Online Conference
"The Internet and Learning: What We have Discovered and Where Are We Headed?"
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Introduction

At a time when labor pools are diminishing and companies are insisting on broader and deeper skill sets from graduating students, technical college students are trying to prepare themselves to enter and thrive in constantly changing workforce environments. As technology changes at an accelerating rate, it is increasingly difficult for technical faculty and institutions to secure and incorporate relevant content.

The current model for securing content has existed for six decades. Stated bluntly, the process is antiquated. Beginning in the 1940's companies joined with schools in advisory capacities to identify competencies and develop appropriate curricula. These curriculum development sessions ranged from informal get-togethers to formalized DACUM conferences.

Only a few schools have become cooperating curriculum training models. Generally schools go through the motions of listening and being responsive, but "then go teach what they want or what suits the teachers." Even though a limited number of partnership companies are willing to report that the curriculum taught is archaic, they are not willing to go against the grain and be perceived as "boat rockers". Often companies assign "advisory" responsibilities to human resource or public relations personnel rather than supervisors who are responsible for quality and standards. When curriculum specifics are discussed, company representatives have, on occasion, hesitated to share their processes

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out of fear of divulging proprietary practices to their competitors. As a consequence, curriculum and curriculum standards have become weaker rather than stronger.

The needs of both institutions and companies can be addressed through specific and dynamic curriculum that can be accessed anytime, anywhere. ***Building and delivering "dynamic" curricula needs to be re-enthroned as the engine which drives identifying, recruiting, and retaining quality employees.***

Securing Relevant Content Through the Web

Minnesota West Community and Technical College (MnWest) has reintroduced technical advising as the foundation for quality technical education—a hope expressed when advisory committees originated. But they have done it with the aid of a new tool—the Web.

During the past year MnWest created and tested ***MnEmerge*** at its five campuses scattered over a 300-mile-circumfrance. MnEmerge enables content experts from around the globe to examine online courses and give confidential feedback, which is then prioritized and included into the course thereby making the curriculum current and state-of-the-art.

Plans are underway to test the process within an entire state and multi-state region in order to:

1. Validate findings in an entire state and multi-state region.
2. Refine and document the process.
3. Establish development and delivery standards.
4. Train teachers and companies.
5. Disseminate program results and invite institutional and corporate participation.
6. Evaluate through and under the direction of a nationally recognized curriculum and standards organization.
7. Establish a consortium of users and thereby make the process self-sustaining

MnWest's Web-based Advisory Process

Here is how it works.

1. Project faculty and staff develop content-specific lessons for their advisory committee. Each lesson is examined and evaluated online at company sites by working professionals. Each lesson is then modified as per confidential electronic input, which has been prioritized by participating company designees.

2. After re-testing, the lessons are incorporated within the associated college programs and at participating companies. In addition to enhancing curricula, the process also:

   - Stimulates and introduces new concepts thereby creating synergy and collaboration.

   - Enables designated employees to confidentially and actively participate in student development and progress.

   - Becomes the means for learners and companies to establish long-term relationships.

   - Sets tone within departments and companies for life-long learning and stronger cooperation.

   - Teaches with technology.

   - Increases efficiencies within companies, advisory committees, and college departments.

Our over-riding goal is to revitalize the DACUM and advisory committee process.

An Invitation to Join Us

We now extend an invitation to other schools to join us in this applied research.

Institutional benefits include, but are not limited to:

1. Creating current and relevant technical curricula.
2. Empowering teachers to become collaborators with research and production experts from around the globe.
3. Assuring that educational ties to business/industry become deeper and more long lasting.
4. Better keep the promise made to business and industry when advisory committees originated to "to produce quality employees."

We expect to make the process a national model for elevating curriculum and thereby positively affecting our economy and society.

MnEmerge Process Features

1. Technical faculty are at the center of the project. This project empowers them to secure content and write into their curriculum. It does not displace them. Rather it raises them to new professional levels—enabled with software and process. On the surface, the process appears to make additional work for faculty, but actually makes easier since the focus is on curriculum and delivery. Our experience during the past year shows that collaborations between teachers and industry experts often develops into additional teaching/learning opportunities with companies and their cooperating partners.

2. The process can also be utilized in academic settings such as biology, physics, chemistry and math as well as social sciences—history, political science, and sociology. In these cases, the emphasis is centered on research and collaboration rather than job preparation.

3. The process is simple. Success is dependent on changing the paradigm of technical faculty being disseminators of data and techniques to being employee/training collaborating partners with business and industry (as originally envisioned when advisory committees were first introduced).

4. The primary focus for the three-year project is on changing faculty and institutions to become open and inviting and building on the strengths of champions thereby establishing "best practices" within departments and at institutions.

Advisory Expectations

When inviting companies to become advisory participants, they make a strong commitment to:

1. Participate in new and ongoing and research and advisory issues.
2. Designate at least three employees to participate. Each employee will contribute approximately 50 hours per year.
3. Assure access to web assessable workstation.
4. Allow/encourage college personnel to train and follow-up with personnel at company site.
5. Help evaluate findings. Provide timely feedback.
6. Consider utilizing online courses and lessons after they have been developed and explore measures/means for raising productivity levels and standards through web-based learning.

7. Consider developing company web-based courses and inviting college faculty to evaluate—essentially reversing the role.

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